

SIDEOATS GRAMA

Bouteloua curtipendula

(Michx.) Torr.

plant symbol = BOCU

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



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Uses

Erosion Control: This grass is adapted to most soil conditions. Successful seedings are obtained in rocky, stony, or shallow soils. It is a fair to good erosion control plant when mixed with the other plants naturally associated with it.

Grazing: This is one of the most important range grasses. Although not as palatable as some of the smaller gramas, e.g. blue grama, it is more palatable than many of the other grass species. It produces a much greater volume of forage than blue grama, and this tends to make up for its slightly lower palatability. It remains green later in the fall and usually begins growth in the spring before other gramas. It cures well, and maintains a fairly high feeding value throughout the year.

Wildlife: Furnishes some forage for deer and antelope when green. Elk use this plant throughout the year.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Bouteloua curtipendula, sideoats grama, is a medium-size perennial bunchgrass, 15 to 30 inches tall or occasionally taller. This is the largest and most coarse of the grama grasses. It has a bluish-green color, sometimes with a purplish cast (especially in the spring), and cures to a reddish-brown or straw color. Leaves are coarser than other species of gramas, straight, comparatively stiff, and mostly basal. Ten to thirty small, non-comb-like spikes are borne mostly along one side of each central seed stalk. These spikes drop when mature, leaving a long zigzag stalk.

Adaptation and Distribution

Sideoats grama is found on rocky open slopes, woodlands, and forest openings up to an elevation of about 7,000 feet.

Sideoats grama is distributed throughout most of the United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

Establishment

Seeding of improved strains of this grass is accomplished by drilling in firm, weed-free seedbeds at the rate of 2-1/2 to 5 pounds (or more) pure live seed per acre. Protect from grazing from date of seeding through the second growing season. Seedings should be delayed until good soil moisture is present.

Management

Sideoats grama is not as resistant to grazing as blue grama because of its taller growth habit, but sideoats grama stays green longer and can be grazed for a longer period. Reduced forage production, carrying capacity, and loss in cattle weight is a direct result of overgrazing. Sideoats grama is a normal component of a large number of range sites. The grass lengthens the grazing season and increases forage production, in addition to providing variety in the feed. Sideoats grama will return to most ranges under good management. Practices that will bring the grass back include proper grazing use, planned grazing systems, and brush control.

Pests and Potential Problems

There are no serious pests of sideoats grama.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Released cultivars include 'Butte' (NE), 'El Reno' (OK), 'Haskell' (TX), 'Niner' (NM), 'Premier' (Mexico), 'Trailway' (NE), and 'Vaughn' (NM); informal releases include Killdeer (ND) and Pierre (SD); and source identified releases include Northern Iowa Germplasm, Central Iowa Germplasm, Southern Iowa Germplasm (all from IA). Seeds are available at most western commercial seed sources.

Prepared By & Species Coordinator:
USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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